

6 April 1978

N10

OLC #78-1333

IRAN: The Remembrance of Things Past

In December 1945 Brigadier General Ali Akbar Derakhshani was in an unenviable position. He was the military commander in Tabriz, capital of Azerbaijan Province, but the city was almost completely surrounded by Azerbaijani rebels backed by the Soviet army of occupation. A relief column from Tehran had been blocked by the Soviet troops 250 miles away.

T. Cuyler Young, press attache of the American Embassy in Tehran, visited Tabriz the second week in December 1945 and General Derakhshani, as well as Governor General Morteza Gholi Bayat, told Young that they could not and would not defend the city but would confine themselves to protecting the Governor General's residence and the barracks.

By the next week the barracks had surrendered. Derakhshani reportedly had gone over to the rebels and advised his men to make the best terms they could. Many did so and kept their ranks and pay in the rebel army. Rumor had it that he would become Minister of War in the rebel government. However, on December 20, 1945, he returned to Tehran where he was immediately put under arrest. A few months later he was court-martialed and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was later pardoned by the Shah.

For more than thirty years Derakhshani was a forgotten man. Then on March 27, 1978 retired Brigadier General Derakhshani was arrested by Iranian security officers as he received a package from a Russian employee of the Irano-Soviet Transport Company. Two other Soviet officials reportedly were present.

It seems likely that Derakhshani has been a long-time Soviet agent. At age 82 and long out of the military he would seem to be of little direct value to the Soviets. He may, however, have been acting in a support capacity or as a liaison with other agents. In December 1977 another Soviet espionage operation was uncovered involving an active duty general and others. Its roots also went back to the mid-1940s.

The full scope of Derakhshani's activities in the last three decades may never be known. He died of a heart attack shortly after being taken into custody. (UNCLASSIFIED)

SOURCES: 1. Press
2. B&A, Unclassified